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A COMPARISON OF PERSONAL SOCIAL MEDIA RISK PERCEPTIONS BETWEEN UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AND HUMAN RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

This study contrasts the social media risk perceptions of undergraduate students, versus those of certified Human Resource professionals. Social media is widely used by most segments of the population, and particularly among the age group that includes most undergraduate students. Organizations hiring employees are increasingly examining job applicant's social media postings as part of the applicant screening process. In this study we examine how these groups differ in their perceptions of the risks inherent in using social media, and what these differences may mean for students seeking employment. Recommendations are made for raising undergraduate student awareness of these risks.

Disciplines

Information Security | Management Information Systems | Technology and Innovation

Comments

This paper is a work in progress, with further revisions expected to the discussion and implications sections.

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Social media has become a widely adopted phenomenon by both individuals and organizations. Roughly, 80% of the U.S. population engages on one or more of a myriad of social media platforms, often sharing details about their private lives that might otherwise remain private. Oversharing on social media platforms represents a risk to undergraduate university students as they move into the workforce, as many employers are now using an individual's social media presence as part of their screening process. The focus of this study is to examine how undergraduate, career-minded students and the human resource professionals who evaluate prospective employees view the threats associated with personal social media usage.

To compare and contrast perceptions of personal social media risk between career-minded undergraduate students and human resource professionals, we employed a seeded, ranking-type multi-panel Delphi study. The Delphi method is an iterative, consensus-oriented process technique where a panel of experts is organized around a topic of interest and tasked with identifying the most relevant items relating to the topic. Ideally, the process continues until the expert panel reaches consensus in rankings. For our study, we utilized the results from Rivera and colleagues' (2015) study on undergraduate student perceptions of social media risks, and augmented these with two human resource professionals panels, one panel (n=28) having under 5 years' experience and the other panel (n=23) having over 5 years' experience. The HR panels were provided the same seeded list used in Rivera and colleagues' (2015) study to ensure consistency in our comparison analysis between the three groups.

Utilizing Kendall's Coefficient of Concordance (W) to assess the extent to which our expert panels reached consensus, each HR panel achieved strong consensus on the rankings of personal social media risk factors. Both panels ranked the following risk factors as their 2 most important: "Unintended exposure to information" and "Damage to personal reputation." Beyond these two risk factors, there was wide variance in the rankings of other personal social media risk factors between the 2 HR panels. Conversely, the results from Rivera and colleagues' (2015) Delphi study reveal that undergraduate students ranked each of these concerns consistently lower, while placing higher importance on identity theft and hacking/social engineering concerns. Additionally, the undergraduate student panel achieved a lower level of consensus in their rankings, suggesting that this panel was not able to agree as readily on the relative importance of the personal social media risk factors they were presented.

Our results suggest that there is a striking difference between the HR professionals and undergraduate students in their outlook regarding personal social media risks. Undergraduate

students appear to focus primarily on the immediate personal risks inherent in using social media (identity theft, hacks, social engineering), while HR professionals view personal social media risks through a more career and reputation centric lens. We conclude that pedagogical implications for these findings include educating students about heightened social media scrutiny and being more adept at impression management because their social media use has impacts before and after entry into the workforce.